

# BILLERICAY & WICKFORD Gazette



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## TRAVELLER MUM FACING EVICTION

Mother-of-four faces homelessness after her gipsy status is revoked

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GIPSIES living on the Hovefields site in Wickford are desperately fighting for their right to stay as the threat of eviction looms large.

Bailiffs could roll on to the site - which is made up of both legal and illegal pitches - but families are doing their best to fight the orders that could leave them homeless.

One family has applied for planning permission to make their plot legal, while mum-of-four Mary McCann, is battling to have her gipsy status reinstated.

### Status revoked

Her status was revoked after it was ruled she no longer travels for economic reasons and has been told she must leave the camp, in Hovefields Drive, by August.

But the 30-year-old Irish traveller said: "How can they say who I am? My culture and upbringing is as a gipsy, and I've travelled my whole life. But they've decided that I'm not and have told me I have to leave."

Two inquiries held in 2008 and 2009 investigated Miss McCann's status at her pitch, called the Paddocks.

Planning laws say that gipsies can only receive preferential treatment for permission if they can prove they need to travel for economic reasons.

But Miss McCann, a single mother who survives on benefits, said: "I can't do traditional gipsy work because I look after my boys full time.



**EVICTED:** Mary McCann, pictured with her children, Andy, Jeny, Jonny and Bill, is being evicted from her home at Paddocks, Hovefields Drive, Wickford, as her traveller status has been revoked



**MARCHING ORDERS:** Travellers are fighting to stay at Hovefields

wrong. "I can't face the thought of leaving here - I have nowhere else to go."

Elsewhere on the site, Miles Delaney has applied to Basildon District Council for his family home to be made legal after discovering temporary planning permission granted to a previous owner ceased when he left.

Dr Angus Murdoch, a national expert in gipsy planning issues, is acting as agent for the case.

### Officially green belt

The planning committee will debate the matter and make a decision by June 8.

Jill Walsh, who lives in a house in Hovefields Drive, said she would be making an official comment on the application.

She said: "The site is officially green belt, and that is how it should remain."

Leader of the Council, Tony Ball, said: "We are working with other agencies, including the police and the county council towards the eviction of the site. We are still trying to encourage traveller families to leave of their own accord."

"But that doesn't mean I'm not a gipsy."

She added: "I've lived here for six years and I've stayed so that my boys can have a better education than I did."

"They all go to school, and they do well and enjoy it there."

"But I want them to live on a site

because that's our way"

Miss McCann's siblings and mother all live on pitches at Hovefields, which has been home to travelling families for more than a decade.

The family was at the centre of accusations around an unregistered building business, but

Miss McCann said: "We're a good family."

"The children are well-behaved and we've never had any complaints and, if we did, I would fix it straightaway."

"I've done everything I can to go through this process the right way, but it seems everything I do is

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